DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 346 513 CS 507 827

AUTHOR Collins, Stephen
TITLE A Rhetorical Systems Approach Based on a General Systems Theory Analog.
PUB DATE 31 Oct 91
NOTE 30p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (77th, Atlanta, GA, October 31-November 3, 1991).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Needs Assessment; *Rhetorical Criticism; *Rhetorical Theory; *Systems Analysis; *Systems Approach
IDENTIFIERS Bertalanffy (Ludwig von); *Ehninger (Douglas); *General Systems Theory

ABSTRACT

Douglas Ehninger's conceptualization of rhetorical theories as "systems" has been criticized for its vagueness in terminology, its potentially skewed perspective, and its inability to apply a stasis to a kinetic phenomenon--namely, rhetoric. The seven recommendations offered in this paper attempt to expand upon the approach and correct for shortcomings. Each recommendation for change is based on the more detailed and fully developed theory of Ludwig von Bertalanffy. First, a system should be limited only by method and hierarchy of ends, not by size. Second, rhetorical systems should be conceptualized as open systems that exchange components with their environment. Third, systems analysis (particularly at the level of a single rhetoric or smaller) should attempt to determine interaction patterns among rhetorical elements or subsystems upon an evaluation of their hierarchy. Fourth, environmental needs should be conceptualized as hierarchies ordered from the most general to the most specific, with only certain needs being emphasized at a given time. Fifth, systems from different time periods should be compared to see how emphasis patterns within the hierarchy of potential needs have changed over time. Sixth, systems should be contrasted to see why they differ. Finally, rhetorical systems analysis should focus on long term changes within particular systems. (One table, 5 figures and 19 endnotes are included.) (Author/SG)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

C 5

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Stephen Collins

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED346513

A RHETORICAL SYSTEMS APPROACH BASED ON A GENERAL SYSTEMS THEORY ANALOG

STEPHEN COLLINS

COMMUNICATION STUDIES
NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

OCTOBER 31, 1991

CS507827

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ABSTRACT

Douglas Ehninger's conceptualization of rhetorical theories as "systems" has been criticized for its vagueness in terminology, its potentially skewed perspective, and its inability to apply a stasis to a kinetic phenomenon, rhetoric. In an attempt to expand upon this approach and correct for its shortcomings, this paper makes seven recommendations. Each recommendation for change is based on the more detailed and fully developed general systems theory suggested by Ludwig von Bertalanffy during the 1950s.

A RHETORICAL SYSTEMS APPROACH BASED ON A GENERAL SYSTEMS THEORY ANALOG

The term *system*, general by nature, appears in many diverse disciplines. It can be found in scientific theory, social theory, and even rhetorical theory. In the latter, the concept of systems gives an interesting perspective to the development of various rhetorics over the past two thousand years. The rhetorical systems approach, originally developed by Douglas Ehninger in 1967 and 1968, looks at individual treatises or groups of treatises as systems which arise out of a culture or environment in order to satisfy a societal need, by achieving one or several ends. According to Ehninger, these ends are organized in some type of hierarchy. The system itself is defined to be "an organized, consistent, and coherent way of talking about something."[1]

This conceptualization, though unique within rhetorical historiography, unfortunately, has received minimal attention within journals in the decades following its conception. Robert Scott addressed the concept with Ehninger during the mid-1970s in two articles and a 1978 Speech Communication Association seminar on rhetorical systems generated articles by McKerrow, Skopec, Anderson, and Leff that were published in 1982.[2] These latter articles either defended or attacked the approach laid down by Ehninger and Scott. Skopec wrote one additional article that actually applies systems theory in 1982 when he studied the Eighteenth-century theory of expression within select rhetorics.[3] In each of the

above cases, very little new theory or clarification of Ehninger's rhetorical systems approach was ever generated.

The articles did discuss some of the approach's shortcomings, however; shortcomings that may have severely limited the approach's usefulness. These shortcomings are primarily a vagueness in terminology, a potentially skewed perspective on historic rhetorics, and an inability to confine rhetorical phenomena. Skopec noted that the vagueness of Ehninger's system definition could possibly lead to ambiguity in describing rhetorical phenomena and, consequently, make the identification of systems an "endless task."[4] Anderson criticized the approach for not studying a rhetoric's relationship to its environment in nearly enough detail and denounced it for pulling rhetorics out of their historical context, essentially tainting them with a future perspective or a "whig bias."[5] Finally, Ehninger, himself, noted the approach's inability to confine phenomena which cannot be confined easily. According to Ehninger, the systems historiographer must first apply "a false stasis to a kinetic phenomenon" and, second, systematize arts or skills of discourse which cannot be "compartmentalized."[6] Each shortcoming, by itself, could easily thwart any valuable systems research.

The criticism leads one to conclude that the rhetorical systems approach was either a bad idea from the start or that Ehninger's concepts are simply a roughly hewn, but insightful, foundation block. This paper will argue that Ehninger, and to a lesser degree Scott, only touched the surface of the 'iceberg' and that a more complete view of their approach most likely lays hidden within the general systems theory developed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy and others during the 1950s and 1960s. Bertalanffy focused his attention on the creation of a systems theory that could be used in any discipline regardless of whether it was a science or a liberal

art. This broad, multi-disciplinary approach shares several similarities with Ehninger's rhetorical systems approach. First, both address systems as phenomena that interact with their environments. Second, both address a large range of potential system sizes. Third, both address the concept of system hierarchy. Fourth, both address system changes over time. Finally, both attempt to use their theories to explain constantly changing kinetic phenomena that were previously thought too complicated to explain. General systems theory, thus, appears to be a close, though much more detailed, analog of the rhetorical systems approach. Though Ehninger gives no mention of this body of work in his articles, he may have been influenced by it indirectly. Whether this is the case or not, general systems theory may give rhetoricians a good idea of what the rest of Ehninger's 'iceberg' looks like. This paper, therefore, will offer seven recommendations for clarifying and expanding the rhetorical systems approach. An explanation of Ehninger and Scott's tenets as well as general systems theory concepts will accompany each recommendation when needed. The degree to which each recommendation is dependent on general systems theory varies.

Recommendation 1: A system should not be limited to any particular size, but, instead, should be constrained only by its method and hierarchy of ends. Ehninger states that a system must be comprised of a "hierarchy of ends" and a "distinguishing method" and that the system can be either a single treatise or a group of treatises.[7] This last criteria, dealing with a system's size limits, serves no useful purpose and may even hinder analysis. Though Ehninger demonstrates the value of analysis on a macroscopic scale and suggests that analysis of a single treatise has utility, size limitation hurts some forms of systems study. For instance, several individual sections of Aristotle's single treatise *Rhetoric* cover an enormous

amount of material compared to Alexandre Sylvain's *The Orator*. The former deals with three forms of discourse -- forensic, political, and epideictic -- while the latter only deals with a select number of judicial cases or examples an orator may encounter. If the size restriction is adhered to, a rhetorician would have to avoid looking at just the judicial elements of *Rhetoric* since they do not comprise a system *in toto* and, consequently, miss potential insights that may come, for example, from a comparison with other judicial elements found in works by scholars such as Sylvain.

The recommendation to lift the size restriction is supported by Bertalanffy's concept of systems. His general theory discusses systems of cells at one end of the scale and systems of society on the other end.[8] There is no size constraint. The only significant difference between the two extremes is the basic unit of study within each system. One system focuses on single cells; the other focuses on entire populaces or cultures. Within rhetorical systems, the unit of study varies primarily with the end. Large systems such as the ones Ehninger studied exhibit broad ends. Smaller systems exhibit more specific ends. In any case, systems should be constrained solely by their method and end. If a method and end constitute a single element within a treatise, then that element should constitute a system. For instance, a study of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* may reveal that *pathos* constitutes a system. Its end is to persuade audiences artistically. The method involves putting the audience into a certain frame of mind by stirring their emotions. By considering *pathos* as a system, a systems analyst can study its sub-structure, its interaction with others elements within such treatises as the *Rhetoric*, or its survivability and changes within other treatises through Roman times and the present. A. Kibedi Varga suggests that if rhetorics were considered as systems, with sub-systems at

various levels, analysis could be quite fruitful between levels normally found subordinated within a rhetoric:

> If we are willing to translate the rhetorical curriculum into a hierarchical rhetorical system, we can maintain that the relationship between the lower levels has been studied, even if not enough, by stylistics (grammar-elocution) or by rhetoric (elocution-invention); the relationship spanning the highest to the lower levels [one of the highest levels including *pathos*], on the contrary, has been traditionally neglected by rhetoric. . . . If students of classical and Renaissance rhetoric try seriously to reconstruct the complete framework of rhetoric, they could thus offer a very valuable contribution to a modern theory of discourse. [9]

Varga's comments focus on the relationship between elements normally found within rhetorics and treatises. The value of studying the interaction between such elements, or levels such as elocution, invention, and *pathos* therefore is greatly enhanced if system size is no longer a constraint on systems analysis.

In addition to allowing analysis along the lines suggested by Varga, systems analysis also could consider microscopic analysis of only one single element. With no size limitation, elocution could be studied to see how it changed over time. Elocution formed one of five canons in Cicero's rhetoric. During the renaissance scholars such as Henry Peacham put monumental emphasis on elocution and excluded consideration of the four other canons. Within Thomas Wilson's treatise, ***The Arte of Rhetorique***, however, elocution appears with the four other canons. Ramistic rhetoric, on the other hand, considers elocution to be one of the two main divisions of rhetoric, the other being delivery. With so much variation in

elocution's role over time, its analysis as a system interacting with different environments or as a sub-system interacting with different sub-systems over time could be very insightful. This type of analysis simply requires that Ehninger's constraint on the "treatise as smallest system" be removed.

A systems analyst may even decide to look at individual *topoi* as systems. The range of analysis is effectively limitless as long as a method and end can be identified for a rhetorical element.

If the system constitutes many treatises, the systems analysis can still proceed as long as all the elements needed to complete the system are present. This would include rhetorics which borrow from two or more treatises as a collective body. The system may encompass all treatises of a classical nature and have an extremely broad method and end as identified by Ehninger within his works. In every case, the system should be constrained by its method and end, and not by its size.

Recommendation 2: rhetorical systems should be conceptualized as open systems that exchange components with their environment. Closed systems assume that there is no interchange between the system and environment, whereas open systems do assume interchange between the system and environment.[10] As open systems, rhetorical systems engage in a unique exchange. The environmental exchange defines a system's purpose and is laid out by Ehninger within his works. The system inputs a need or responds to a need from rhetors or theorists within the environment and then attempts to render a service back to the environment to hopefully meet the need in as successful a manner as possible.[11] This 'need-system-service rendered' model describes the system as it is meant to function.

The degree to which this rendering of a service is successful varies from case to case.

If the system does not appear to function as well as it should, new systems may appear to counter its inabilities to render a service. These new systems may borrow heavily from a previous system or may be entirely unrelated to past efforts. A lack of success may be signposted in several different ways. First, the work under consideration may eventually cease to be printed. For a popular system such as Ramistic rhetoric which received many different printings, fewer printings is a sure sign that the system is losing popularity and its ability to serve the rhetorical needs of the time. Second, a proliferation of new rhetorics may also signal a lack of success. The publication of Bacon's *Novum Organum* and similar views indicates a change within the environment. As change occurs, older systems may lose the ability to satisfy new rhetorical needs. Third, a lack of success may be signposted by criticism from the environment. Richard Whately's rhetorical system, embodied by his treatise *Elements of Rhetoric*, receives considerable criticism in I. A . Richards' *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*. Though some people may consider Kenneth Burke's system of rhetoric as a masterpiece, it has endured criticism for its vagueness and confusion. The *topoi* have also seen their share of criticism over the centuries indicating that as a system, they too have seen a great deal of degeneration. Lamy's criticism strongly suggests some failure of the *topoi*:

> This Art [the topics] is dangerous for persons of but indifferent Learning, because it makes them acquiesce and sit down with small suggestion easily obtain'd and neglect to seek after others of more solid Importance. [12]

In each case, the failing success of a system is reflected by scholars attacking the system or pointing out errors in its functioning that need correcting. The short comings, however, may be countered by revisions to the system. Such efforts may attempt to repair the system through the revision of concepts or the addition of some entirely new material to complement material already present. This may result in a revised treatise or an entirely new one in attempts to correct perceived shortcomings. Two of the best examples of adding new material in order to counter or correct perceived shortcomings can be found in Cicero's *Brutus* and the *Orator.* A group of rhetoricians known as the Attici favored a much more plain style than that used by Cicero. After writing *De Oratore* Cicero came under considerable attack by the group "for exuberance and verbosity, for the use of rhythmical cadences which in their opinion softened and weakened his style, and for his frigidity of wit."[13] One of his chief critics, Brutus, took him to task at earnest and supposedly prompted Cicero into writing not only *Brutus* but also the *Orator.* Hendrickson sees Cicero's writing primarily as a defense -- what might even be called a revision to counter failing success.

> Cicero is at pains to represent the *Orator* as a work produced at the insistent demand of Brutus. Exactly what this means it is difficult to say, and doubtless there is in it an element of truth, but scarcely I suspect as Cicero represents it. He would have his readers believe that he does it to satisfy the eager curiosity of Brutus. *In reality however it is a reasonable belief that his work is an outgrowth and product of <u>dissenting</u> criticism [italics added].*[14]

Another example of a revisionistic effort may be more timely. This study, for instance, attempts to add scholarly input to the rhetorical systems approach, which may be considered a system itself, in order to counter criticisms about the approach.

Another important concept that must be accounted for when studying scholarly input is the self-regulation of the system within its environment. Scholars who support and partially comprise the system regulate the input of new concepts. After all, some ideas for improving a system may be viewed as entirely ridiculous. The self-regulation to some extent protects the system and makes sure that it does not deviate significantly from that state which most successfully meets a need--its steady state. The self-regulation may take many forms. It may require a new suggestion or idea to fit within the already existing structure of a past system. A suggestion to include certain enthymemes within Henry Peacham's *The Garden of Eloquence*, for example, would most likely have never succeeded since its structure revolved entirely around stylistic devices such as figures and tropes. The environment essentially determines the success of new systems based on preconceived perceptions of what it needs in such a case. Self-regulation also may require a new idea to fit into the moral scheme of society. For instance, a suggestion that a rhetorical system should be updated to emphasize any and all means necessary to persuade an audience would most likely be rejected straightway by Plato and rhetoricians such as Richard Weaver. Dramatic self-regulation of this nature has occurred in disciplines such as astronomy and has affected such men as Galileo Galilei who was punished for proclaiming that several heavenly bodies revolve around Jupiter instead of around the Earth. Self-regulation may also depend upon any number of other factors that affect scholarly acceptance of an idea.

The value of viewing rhetorics or elements of rhetorics as open systems can be summed up as follows: by viewing rhetorics as open systems scholars can study the complete life cycle of any particular rhetoric or rhetorical element or even several generations of similar rhetorics or elements which attempt to adapt to fluctuating environmental needs. Ehninger's conception of a rhetoric responding to a need explains why a system comes into being and why the system survives or eventually dies within a rhetorical environment which regulates the acceptance of new ideas. Only by viewing a rhetoric or rhetorical element as an open system exchanging components can a complete study of one particular system be made.

Recommendation 3: systems analysis, particularly at the level of a single rhetoric or smaller, should attempt to determine the patterns of interaction among rhetorical elements or sub-systems upon an evaluation of their hierarchy. Systems analysis allows one to study how a single element affects an entire system. This determines the degree of interaction of an element or sub-system and also its level within the system's hierarchy. The recommendation originates with Bertalanffy's concept of centralization and ties in well with Ehninger's notion of a "hierarchy of ends."[15] Bertalanffy notes that a sub-system's "rank-order" depends on its ability to affect other elements within a system. The greater the impact of any one sub-system on the rest of the system, the greater the importance of the sub-system or its centralization. Consequently, if a sub-system has a greater importance than other sub-systems, it also has a broader end or purpose. For instance, a person's spinal cord has a greater centralization or importance than a person's legs. Loss of leg functioning results in a paraplegia. Loss of the spinal cord results in quadraplegia. Note also that the "purpose" of the legs is to allow some flexibility in external movement. The "purpose" of the spinal cord is to allow all flexibility in external

movement. Along a similar line of thought, a person's heart exhibits greater centralization or importance than a person's spinal cord. Its purpose is also broader. Whereas the spinal cord's purpose may be viewed as allowing movement, the heart's purpose is to maintain blood flow and, consequently, life.

Similarly, the degree of interaction of a rhetorical element within a rhetoric determines its centralization and position within a hierarchy. For instance, consider several different sub-systems existing within Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. A few of these are the three types of oratory--deliberative, forensic, and epideictic: the two types of proof--inartistic and artistic: and the three modes of proof--*ethos, pathos*, and *logos*. Those sub-systems with the highest position within the hierarchy exhibit the greatest centralization and also the broadest ends. If one removes deliberative oratory from the system, roughly one-third of the system's oratory is destroyed. If artistic proof is removed from the system, all three types of oratory are still possible, but the methods for achieving the three different ends are reduced. The removal of artistic proof only disables the three types of oratory while the removal of deliberative oratory obliterates one of the three. If *logos* is removed from the system, the net damage is even less severe. The three types of oratory now at least have two methods of generating artistic and inartistic proof whereas before they had none. The centralization and broadness of ends are summarized below (Table 1).

SUB-SYSTEM	DEGREE OF CENTRALIZATION	BROADNESS OF END
deliberative oratory	greatest	greatest (to persuade for or against a course of action)
artistic proof	less	less (to persuade using created/ artificial material)
logos	least	least (to persuade using material that comprises the speech's content)

Table 1. Sub-systems and their Centralization: A Dependency on their Broadness of End

The total hierarchy for these sub-systems within the *Rhetoric* appears as follows (Fig. 1).

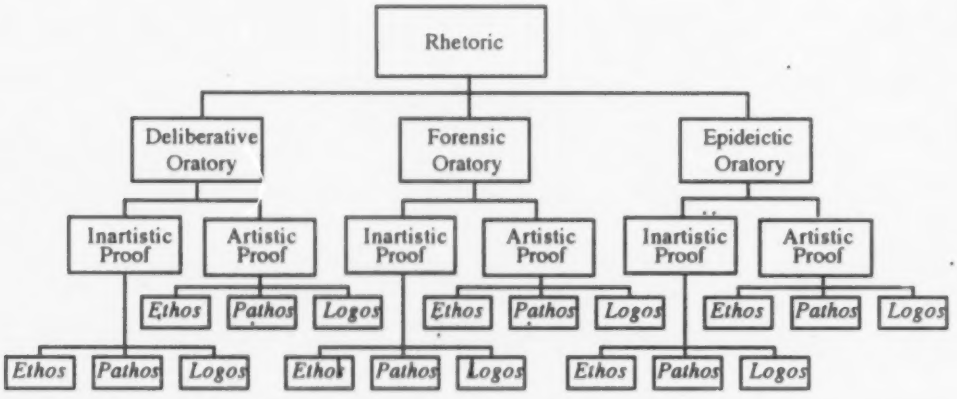


Figure 1. A Partial Hierarchy of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*

Interaction may also be determined solely to allow analysis of a single element. A scholar may not be interested in an entire hierarchy, but in only one element such as *logos*. A scholar wishing to study how *logos* affects other elements within Aristotle's *Rhetoric* may find his or her study enhanced by removing *logos* and its sub-systems from Aristotle's text. If *logos* were omitted from the *Rhetoric*, the rhetorical induction, or example, would disappear. The

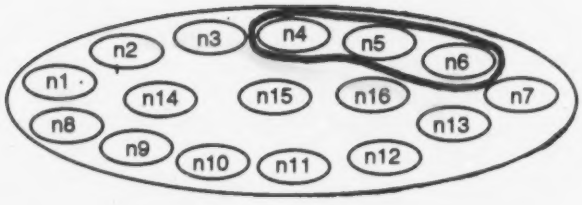
rhetorical syllogism, or enthymeme, would also disappear. This would remove the twenty-eight enthymatic *topoi* from the work also. Deliberative, forensic, and epideictic discourse would rely solely on *ethos* and *pathos* for artificial supporting material or artistic proof. Even some elements of *pathos* would be affected by a lack of *logos*. Several of Aristotle's premises for bringing auditors into a certain state of feeling would be affected by omitting *logos*. For example, a premise for bringing auditors into a state of fear would no longer be able to rely on topics which 1) derive different meanings from a word, 2) elaborate on the consequences of an act , or 3) attempt to expose ulterior motives in public statements. All three of these topics could aid in invoking fear if *logos* were part of the system. In such a manner one could examine every different premise within the *Rhetoric* to see how *logos* and the various enthymemes affected each, thus establishing, in part, the interaction patterns of *logos* within Aristotle's work.

The advantages of this recommendation to study interaction of sub-systems and determine hierarchy are two fold. First, a hierarchy of ends and, consequently, a hierarchy of systems, that is organized inductively can be established in a standard fashion for any rhetoric. Since the hierarchy is determined in every case by the centralization of each sub-system, comparisons can be made between a system at two different times and, hopefully, make changes more readily identifiable and explainable. Second, individual rhetorical elements can be studied in considerable depth by simply determining how they interact with other elements. The method for accomplishing this task, removing the element under consideration, is unique to rhetorical systems analysis.

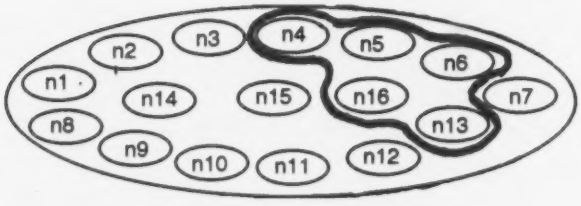
Recommendation 4: Environmental needs should be conceptualized as hierarchies ordered from the most general needs to the more specific with only

certain needs being emphasized at any given time within a culture. As will be demonstrated, this view extends from Ehninger and Scott's view of rhetorical systems and indicates that needs can be described by two different hierarchies. The larger of the two is designated as the *hierarchy of potential needs.* This hierarchy organizes all the past and present needs ever experienced. It represents a cumulative record of all the needs ever responded to by rhetoricians and perhaps even some ignored rhetorical needs. As new needs develop over time that have never been felt before, they are fit into this hierarchy of potential needs. The reason this has been designated as a hierarchy of "potential needs" is because all of the past and present needs exhibit the potential to recur in the future. The smaller of the two hierarchies, the *hierarchy of present needs*, so designated to maintain clarity, is a subset of the larger hierarchy. It organizes only the present environmental needs that affect a system. A system analyzed within its context or environment, should exhibit hierarchies of sub-systems and ends that parallel the hierarchy of present needs.

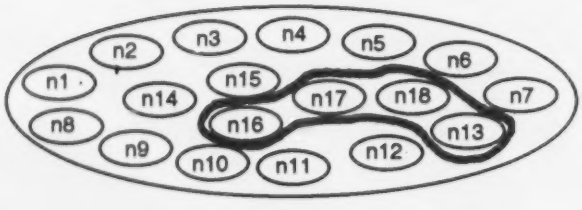
These two hierarchies are valuable to systems analysis because they indicate why some systems survive over time while others fail. Needs change over time. At any one moment of time, there may be a need to know how to speak within a democracy. If a democratic republic is conquered by a bordering monarchy, a need to know how to speak within a democracy may likely be replaced by a need to know how to speak eloquently in the monarch's courts. If the monarchy is eventually overthrown, the need to know how to speak in a democracy may again arise. In situations such as this, the elements that make up the hierarchy of present needs change over time. A Venn diagram of both hierarchies indicates this type of change (Fig. 2).



At time t1, the hierarchy of potential needs contains sixteen elements (on a general level). The hierarchy of present needs (shown by the thick line) contains only three elements, i.e. n4, n5 and n6.



At time t2, the hierarchy of potential needs still contains sixteen elements, but the hierarchy of present needs has changed; it now contains needs n4, n5, n6, n13 and n16.



At time t3, two previously unseen needs have arisen (n17 and n18), while three present needs from time t2 have diminished (n4, n5, and n6). At this time, the hierarchy of potential needs contains eighteen elements. The hierarchy of present needs contains four elements, i.e. n13, n16, n17, and n18.

Figure 2. Hierarchies of Potential and Present Needs at Three Different Times

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

This conceptualization of the two hierarchies indicates how changes in present needs are basically just changes of emphasis among the potential needs. It also illustrates how system change is simply an adaptation of a system to meet a change in emphasis among potential needs.

This view of environmental needs is a product of both Douglas Ehninger and Robert Scott. It establishes needs in a hierarchy that necessarily must parallel Ehninger's hierarchy of ends since every end corresponds to a need. It also recognizes Scott's conception of systems. Scott's argues that several different rhetorical systems exist through time and at any one time, only some of these systems are emphasized.[16] If this is the case, several different needs must also exist through time with only some of these needs receiving emphasis. This is the view taken by the conception of needs illustrated above. The approach also allows a rhetorician to study the possibility of creating the "meta - system" discussed by Ehninger which encompasses all past rhetorical systems.[17] The meta - system is simply that system which successfully satisfies the entire hierarchy of potential needs.

This recommendation to view environmental needs in terms of a hierarchy of potential needs and a hierarchy of present needs does not rely much at all on Bertalanffy's concepts. It does, however, borrow from general systems theory when it is used to study rhetorical systems over an extended period of time.

Recommendation 5: systems existing at different time periods should be compared to see how patterns of emphasis within the hierarchy of potential needs have changed over time. This is a valuable avenue of analysis for the rhetorical systems researcher. By studying how the pattern of emphasis among the hierarchy of potential needs changes, a systems analyst can determine how the culture and

society of an environment have changed over time and how the systems have adapted accordingly. Changes in emphasis, perhaps even more importantly, can give clues as to why some systems fail over time while others succeed. For instance, a system which addresses not only the needs of the time, but also several other potential needs, has a better chance of surviving than a system addressing solely the present needs of the time. Assume hypothetically that there are only seven potential needs, n1, n2, n3, n4, n5, n6, and n7 at some initial time, t1. These are all the needs existing previous to and including time t1. At this particular time only needs n1, n2, and n3 are emphasized. There also exists a rhetorical system which just happens to address all three needs designated S(123). (Fig. 3)

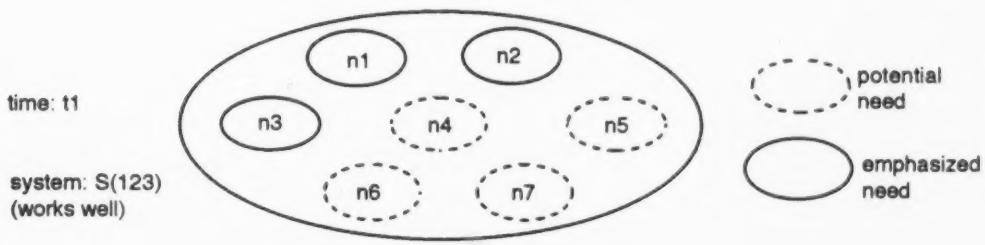


Figure 3. The Functioning of System S(123) at Time t1

The system works perfectly well until a later time, t2. At this time, needs n2 and n3 are no longer emphasized, but need n4 has arisen. In this case, system S(123) is only partially successful since it only addresses half of the needs of the time. (Fig. 4)

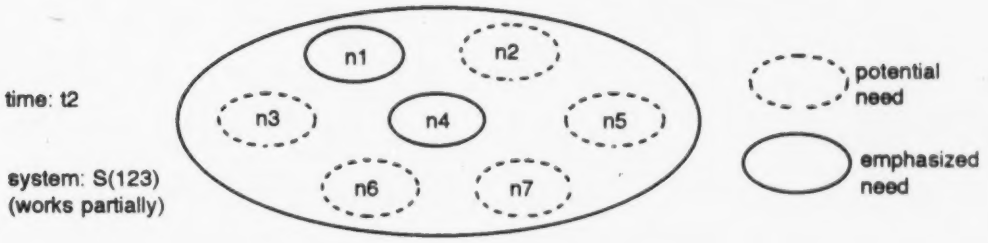


Figure 4. The Functioning of System S(123) at Time t2

Assuming that system S(123) does not or cannot adapt to need n4, it runs into difficulty at a later time, t3. At this time, need n1 disappears and needs n5 and n6 have arisen. In this case, system S(123) fails to function and dies out. (Fig.5)

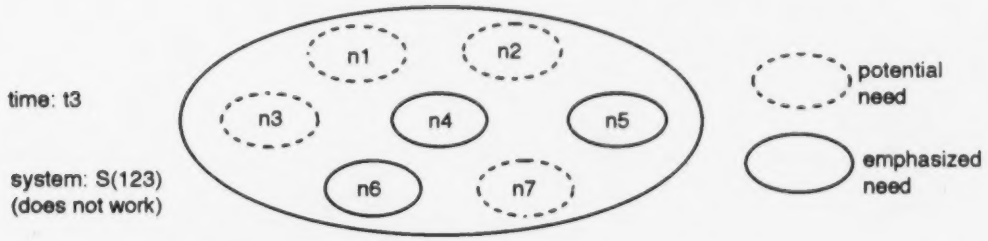


Figure 5. The Functioning of System S(123) at Time t3

If, however, system S(123) was revised to meet the need n4, it would still be partially successful at time t3.

Added insight into survivability is given by Bertalanffy whose theory explains why some systems develop to states such as the one described above and

then cannot adapt to change. Bertalanffy observed that systems undergo progressive segregation, differentiation, and sometimes progressive mechanization, phenomena that often result when systems are revised to higher degrees of complexity and organization.[18] This is exactly what happens in certain rhetorical systems. Progressive segregation or the decrease in interaction among sub-systems can be seen in Thomas Wilson's *Arte of Rhetorique*. Wilson attempted to compartmentalize rhetorical theory under the five classical canons, *inventio, dispositio, elocutio, memorio,* and *pronuntiatio.* In so doing, he placed the three types of oratory, deliberative, judicial, and demonstrative under *inventio* and the affections, classically known as *pathos*, under disposition. During classical times, *pathos* played one of three important modes of artistic proof with which to support the three types of oratory. *Pathos* played an integral interactive role in the development of supporting material. Within Wilson's rhetorical system, *pathos* is something to be considered separate from *inventio* and the creative process. It has essentially moved into a role that allows less interaction with the creative processes involved in generating the three types of oratory.

An example of differentiation, or the tendency to move toward increased specialization, may be found within Richard Sherry's or Henry Peacham's stylistic rhetorics. Their rhetorics not only specialized in the treatment of style, but they also broke style down into extremely specialized figures and tropes. The differentiation went so far that the stylistic rhetorics actually underwent progressive mechanization, the tendency of a system to become so specialized that it can only perform one function This type of analysis explains why stylistic rhetorics by such scholars as Henry Peacham and Richard Sherry lost their favor. Though they both satisfied the emphasized needs of the time, they were too restrictive to adapt

successfully to new needs or recurring past needs, especially as the emphasis within Western society shifted to the more logical and scientific Baconian world view. The unsuccessful systems in this case underwent too much progressive mechanization to adapt to a changing environment. They focused on one specific need and were unable to adapt through revision to the changing emphases among potential needs.

An understanding of survivability, therefore, depends not only on an understanding of a system's ability to accommodate new or recurring needs, but also on a recognition of those systems which undergo progressive segregation and differentiation, for these systems may undergo the most detrimental step, progressive mechanization, and drastically risk failure if the environmental needs change. A rhetorical systems analyst equipped with such an understanding can explain an important phenomenon among rhetorics -- their failure or survival as a system.

Recommendation 6: contrasts of differing systems at any one time should be pursued to determine why one system differs from the other(s). Analysis may indicate that one system accurately determined the needs of its environment while another was in considerable error. Analysis may also indicate that one system attempted only to address a small group while another attempted to address needs of an entire populace. In any case, the differences in each system's focus may explain why one system survives longer than another. The breadth of focus would indicate the numbers of needs addressed and, as shown earlier, this does affect the survivability of a system.

In addition, Bertalanffy's concepts also apply to such a rhetorical study. These systems should be contrasted to see how progressively segregated,

differentiated, or progressively mechanized each is in relation to the other(s). For instance, one system may be much more progressively segregated or differentiated than another. This type of analysis results in interesting insights about how two rhetorics behave that only Bertanlanffy's concepts can illustrate. Talaeus' Ramistic rhetoric, written at approximately the same time as Thomas Wilson's rhetoric, is much more narrow in its focus. It breaks rhetoric down into only two categories, elocution and delivery. Other elements addressed in Wilson's rhetoric are either ignored or delegated to Ramus' treatise on dialectic. Though the environmental needs were similar for Wilson and Talaeus, Ramism satisfied several of those needs within a system of dialectic, thus leaving fewer needs to be satisfied by a system of rhetoric. This reflects a greater degree of differentiation in Ramistic thought and rhetoric. This delineation between rhetoric and dialectic, however, eventually led to a counterreform in Ramistic rhetoric. Howell points out that one counterreformist, Charles Butler, was not satisfied with Ramistic dialectic's attempts to address the needs of the rhetorical environment even though Butler was originally a strong advocate of Ramism:

> Butler limited rhetoric severely to style and delivery with the Ramistic right hand of his youth, and with the less Ramistic left hand of his old age he sought to broaden Ramus' logic by applying it to oratory and by showing that there was for the orator an extra logical theory of invention, arrangement, and memory.[19]

Butler essentially was calling for a less differentiated or specialized system of rhetoric to satisfy what he perceived were the needs of the orator.

The above analysis in this particular case is valuable for two reasons. First, it illustrates how the perception of environmental, rhetorical needs fluctuates.

Wilson perceived the need to address the various steps in an orator's speech preparation from the initial creative glimmer to the actual delivery of the message. Ramus and Talaeus, on the other hand, thought that the needs of the orator were more narrowly focused on elocution and delivery. Butler and other counterreformists indicate that Ramus and Talaeus works may have underestimated or misperceived the creative needs of the orator. Second, analysis illustrates how differentiated systems may work successfully in an environment that exhibits a similar degree of differentiation. Ramus attempted to clarify the boundaries between the various arts of his time and in so doing, the intellectual and pedagogical movement he initiated divided each art into separate differentiated units. Consequently, the environment as a whole was quite differentiated. Ramistic rhetoric, therefore rendered a differentiated service to a differentiated environment and was received successfully. The Ramistic differentiation of rhetoric only began to break down when scholars realized that the environment could not be differentiated as simply as Ramus intended. As the environment moved away from such isolated and specialized disciplines, counterreformists such as Butler began creating new less differentiated rhetorics that incorporated some elements present in Wilson's rhetoric all along.

Differences between systems existing at the same time offer unique insights into the survivability of rhetorics. The systems may exhibit different breadths of focus which has a direct impact on adaptability through revision. Insights into survivability increase if a systems analyst contrasts the degree of progressive segregation, differentiation, and progressive mechanization among each rhetorical system.

Recommendation 7: Rhetorical systems analysis should focus on long term changes within a particular system. As stated earlier, efforts to correct failings may result either in revised rhetorics or in entirely new systems. If entirely new systems are created, a scholar should be able to chart the various generations of systems created to adapt to the environment and counter failure if they are extant.

Valuable insight could come from studying the evolution of systems to meet needs over a long period of time. For instance, a systems analyst could focus entirely on the system of canons discussed by Cicero and Quintilian and then trace their appearance and evolution in the work of Melanchthon, Cox, and Wilson. This type of systems analysis, relying on a study of input by Melanchthon, Cox, and Wilson is essentially a systems approach for tracing Cox's or Wilson's lineage. The primary difficulty with this type of analysis may be finding enough of an extant record to trace the development of a particular set of systems.

Summary

The above seven recommendations give rhetorical systems theory the ability to make useful insights into rhetorics or rhetorical elements by illustrating how environmental needs affect systems, how they force systems to change in order to survive, how scholarly input maintains systems through revisions, how sub-systems or individual rhetorical elements interact with each other, how hierarchies of needs, ends, and systems are structured in terms of emphasis and centralization, and how progressive segregation, differentiation, and progressive mechanization affect hierarchical ordered systems over time.

The recommendations hopefully clear up some of the vagueness of Ehninger's original terminology. A system, "an organized, consistent, and coherent way of talking about something," may be redefined as 'a body of work comprised of a single treatise, a group of treatises, or a single element within one rhetorical treatise, that satisfies an environmental need by rendering a service back to the environment.' The system must also contain a distinct method and a hierarchical structure of ends and interacting sub-systems.

The recommendation that systems be viewed in terms of hierarchies of needs to which they respond hopefully alleviates Anderson's concern that the relationship between a system and its environment is not adequately addressed. The recommendation also limits a rhetorician's ability to pull a system out of its historical context and give it a future bias, by forcing a system's survivability to be viewed as a direct function of environmental interaction.

Finally, the recommendations do not require that a "false stasis" be applied to a "kinetic phenomena." Instead, they explain the kinetic aspects of the phenomena, the ability to change over time. Also, systems analysis need not be as concerned as before with arts or skills that cannot be compartmentalized easily. If rhetoricians cannot study systems or sub-systems with concrete boundaries, they can study interaction through permeable or indistinct boundaries. The seven recommendations based on a general systems theory analog hopefully offer a more complete view to this historiographic approach introduced in its broadest sketch by Ehninger.

Endnotes

[1] Douglas Ehninger, "On Rhetoric and Rhetorics, " Western Speech Journal 31 (1967): 242-249; Douglas Ehninger, "On Systems of Rhetoric," Philosophy and Rhetoric 1 (Summer 1968):131.

[2] Ray E. McKerrow, "On Rhetorical Systems: A Symposium," Pennsylvania Speech Communication Annual 38(1982): 5-7; Eric Skopec, "Systems Theory as an Historiographic Perspective," Pennsylvania Speech Communications Annual 38 (1982): 13; Floyd D. Anderson, "On Systems of Western Rhetoric: A Response to 'Whig' Misreadings," Pennsylvania Speech Communication Annual 38 (1982): 19; Michael C. Leff, "Concrete Abstractions: A Response to Anderson and Skopec." Pennsylvania Speech Communication Annual 38 (1982): 21-24.

[3] Eric Skopec, "The Theory of Expression in Selected Eighteenth-Century Rhetorics," Explorations in Rhetoric: Studies in Honor of Douglas Ehninger (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, 1982) 119-136.

[4] Skopec, "Systems" 13.

[5] Anderson 15.

[6] Ehninger, "On Systems: 142.

[7] Ehninger, "On Systems: 141.

[8] Ludwig von Bertalanffy, Problems of Life: An Evaluation of Modern Biological Thought (New York: Harper, 1952) 10. This work illustrates the range of system sizes unique to general systems theory.

[9] A. Kibedi Varga, "Rhetoric, a Story or a System? A Challenge to Historians of Renaissance Rhetoric," Renaissance Rhetoric: Studies in the Theory

and Practice of Renaissance Rhetoric ed. James J. Murphy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983) 90.

[10] A decent discussion of entropy, negantropy, and the concept of the open system can be found in the following works of Bertalanffy: "The Meaning of General Systems Theory," General System Theory: Foundation, Development, Applications (New York: Braziller, 1968); "The Theory of Open Systems in Physics and Biology," Science 3(1950): 23-29. Also see Ludwig von Bertalanffy's "An Outline of General System Theory," British Journal for the Philosophy of Science 1 (1951):134.

[11] Enos, Ricahrd Leo, ed., "Douglas Ehninger's 'The Promise of Rhetoric:' A Ten-Year Re-View," Rhetoric Society Quarterly 18 (Spring, 1988): 193.

[12] John T. Harwood, ed., The Rhetoric of Thomas Hobbes and Bernard Lamy (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986) 350.

[13]H.M.Hubbel, introduction, Orator, by Cicero (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1962) 298.

[14]G.L. Hendrickson, "Cicero's Correspondence with Brutus and Calvus on Oratorical Style," American Journal of Philology 47(1926): 254.

[15] A good discussion of centralization and hierarchy is found within Bertalanffy's "An Outline of General System Theory" and Problems of Life.

[16] Robert L. Scott, "Colloquy I. A Synoptic View of Systems of Western Rhetoric," Quarterly Journal of Speech 61 (1975):439-447.

[17] Ehninger, "On Systems" 142-143.

[18] Progressive segregation, differentiation, and progressive mechnization are discussed thoroughly in Bertalanffy's "An Outline of General System Theory" and Problems of Life.

[19] Wilbur Samuel Howell, Logic and Rhetoric in England, 1500-1700, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956) 319.